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LIFE AND LETTERS OF WASHINGTON ALLSTON.

BY JARED B. FLAGG.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.

A book of 426 pages on Washington Allston, with numerous autotype reproductions from his paintings! Was there really a demand for such an elaborate memorial of the painter of "Belshazzar's Feast" in the Boston Museum? Only a certain set of old fashioned amateurs, who cannot keep pace with the rapid strides of modern art, and who still cling to Allston's memory as to a sort of American Titian, may have looked out for such a book, and now greet it with all the mild enthusiasm left to old age. The younger generation, however, aspiring to understand modern art, which sacrifices all ideas and feelings to technical accomplishment, has but little in common with the austere dilettantism of Washington Allston.

The author of the book undoubtedly meant well, and absolved his duty in a masterly manner, a biography compiled with such loving care and got up in such a stately manner is seldom seen in the market. The gathering of all the written and verbal memorandas, manuscripts, and letters necessary for this reliable biography which dwells on every detail of the painter's private life, and every minutiae of his public career, must have been a work of years. It deserves to become the standard Allston biography for all his admirers. Based entirely on facts, the impartial reader can find no fault with it, except it were with the bombast and eulogical comments, which Mr. Flagg deems necessary to introduce into every chapter.

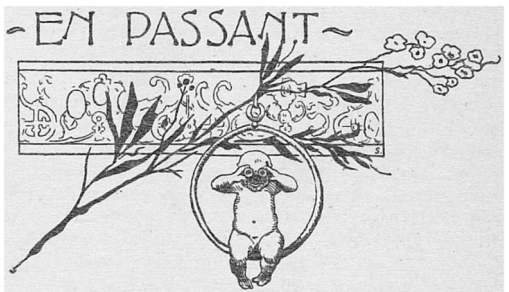
Washington Allston could be treated in a friendly manner without receiving the culte of a demi-god and absurd comparison with the cinque cento masters. As a man of artistic temperament and ambition, he stood high above even the more advanced of his period, and Longfellow's, Lowell's and Emerson's admiration for him, can probably be explained by the sympathy they felt for that quiet enthusiast whose dreary fate it was to paint "under debt" in Cambridgeport. What a Hades Cambridgeport must have been seventy-five years ago to a man of Allston's character!

And we, standing in the full glare of sunlight when we look back to the past, and perceive his dignified figure against the dark, sombre background of his unfinished "Belshazzar's Feast," with its heavy architectonic background and life-size figures, even the most radical impressionist among us should feel something like reverence for that man, who ever shunned popularity and held nothing dearer than his art. Many of our mercenary shyster painters might go to the Boston Museum of Fine arts and learn something of that sublime butcher, who was sincere even when he made such daubs as "Lorenzo and Jessica."

His nobility of character can best be traced in his outline drawings, they are firm, graceful, and

competent, but he invariably failed to convey the idea they expressed into his finished pictures, which have but little merit in regard to coloring, values, or modeling. He was an imitator all his life and very often a copyist as in "The Sisters," where a whole figure is borrowed from Titian's Lavinia. He liked the architectonic background of Titian, the Michael Angelo attitudes of Tintoretto, the purity of design of Raphael, and now and then demonstrated in his paintings the result of these studies. Of all his paintings that are at present in America his "Angel, liberating St. Peter from Prison" in the insane asylum at Worcester, is the only one that has decided merit. The slender figure of the angel, robed in white, his sweet Raphaelic face framed in by waves of brown hair, is beautiful and almost worth a trip to Worcester. His portraits like those of Coleridge and his mother represent, perhaps, his best work though they can in no way stand comparison with the portraits of Gilbert Stuart.

The admiration he aroused among his European colleagues like that expressed by Leslie in his interesting correspondence with the American painter can easily be explained. The art of painting, which has fallen asleep with the decadence of the Dutch school, was once more in an embryonic state. It was the time of Davids and Overbecks, a time devoid of great masters. Thus a young American artist, who was only temporarily in Europe and who displayed an over abundance of ambition and ideas, could easily be overrated.



Paris will have its next World's Fair in 1900.

Veretchagin is employed at a series of pictures, depicting the French invasion into Russia in 1812.

The design for the title page of THE ART CRITIC is by Mr. E. B. Bird, of Boston.

A new column headed "American Art Gossip," will be introduced in the second number.

Catulle Mendes, the well known writer of frivolous stories made recently a peculiar confession in the "Confidences de Salon," i. e. answers made by celebrities, to questions put by a Paris journal. The question, "Ce que je voudrais être?" he answered with "Hugo, Wagner, or God."

The German art exhibit at the Chicago Fair utterly failed to convey to Americans a correct idea of the importance of modern German art. Of the recognized masters, only Adolf Menzel—of whom French critics have said "we have everything that Germany has in art except a Menzel,"—was satisfactorily represented.